

Riverside Study - 1992

PDF Notes

The study was originally laid out in software no longer used by the Community Development Department. As a result, a number of chart images did not convert properly and the text was repaginated. The table of contents and file names refer to the original page numbering system. In addition, many photographs were deleted to compress file sizes for the web.

If you desire to review the report in its original format, contact Elaine Thorne at 617/349-4648 to request a copy.

H O U S I N G

Housing

Introduction: Our Housing Needs

Since the beginning of the 1980s, federal funding for housing has decreased 80 percent, from \$30 billion to \$8 billion dollars annually. In Massachusetts, progressive housing programs using state money made up in part for the decline in federal funds; however, with the current fiscal constraints, state funding has diminished dramatically. More than at any time in recent decades, the city must now rely on its own resources to find funding for housing programs.

In light of this situation, the Community Development Department undertook a housing needs study in 1990. The resulting report, *Cambridge Housing Challenges*, examined different housing elements in Cambridge, including the age and income of residents, and revealed where the greatest housing needs for the city were located. It reported that, while the number of units has increased during the last decade to nearly 42,000 city-wide, the ability of people to afford those units has decreased. Those people who are working in jobs that would have allowed them to buy houses in the past, now find prices in Cambridge beyond their reach. In addition, rental prices, especially for family-size units, are beyond the ability of many working families to pay. Over one-third of renter households in the city pay more than 30 percent of their monthly incomes in rent. The federal government considers this a rent burden, meaning that these households may not have enough income to pay for other basic needs such as heating fuel or food. In rent controlled units, again, 29 percent of the households pay more than 30 percent of their monthly income in rent.

Not surprisingly, the waiting list for families seeking subsidized housing has increased to over 4,000 households in 1990. The average wait is four years, and then only one in three families are placed. Due to the long waits and serious supply shortage, there is now some doubling up among those least able to afford housing.

Riverside residents find themselves facing the same housing needs as found throughout the city, as shown in residents' responses to the 1990 telephone survey. Nine out of ten Riverside residents surveyed said there is a need for more low- and moderate-income housing in Cambridge and would support such housing in the Riverside neighborhood. In addition, the large majority of respondents said that rental housing was needed more than owner housing. In nearly every demographic category, including age, income, length of residency, race and gender, respondents said that rental housing is needed more than owner-occupied housing.

Committee Discussions

Of the many topics discussed over the eight month life of the Study Committee, housing took the longest amount of time. For five weeks, the Committee went over the problems of an aging housing stock, rapidly increasing housing prices, and the affect this has had on the neighborhood. The Committee views housing as the key to maintaining a diverse neighborhood and developed their recommendations to that end. This chapter will explore three aspects of the housing situation in Riverside: availability, affordability and accessibility.

Availability

- Riverside has 3,232, or eight percent of the city's 41,809 housing units.
- The number of dwelling units in Riverside has increased by 245 units since 1980, representing an eight percent increase. During the same time the number of units city-wide increased by at least 1717 equalling a four percent increase.
- Riverside has a smaller household size than the average for the city, 1.97 persons per household versus 2.08. The neighborhood also has a smaller average family size, at 2.85 persons per family versus 2.90 for the city.
- Riverside has a lower proportion of single family houses and two family houses than the city as a whole; however, the neighborhood has a higher proportion of three family and multi-family buildings.

	Single-family	Two-family	Three-family	Multi-family
Riverside	174 (27%)	136 (21%)	168 (26%)	171 (25%)
City	3449 (35%)	3171 (32%)	1693 (17%)	1473 (15%)

- The neighborhood also has a lower proportion of condominiums (11%) than the city as a whole, with 340 condo units. Condos make up 19 percent of the housing stock city-wide.
- The vast majority of Riverside residents are renters. Eighty percent of the neighborhood residents rent, while 20 percent own their home. These figures compare to city-wide figures which show 70 percent of residents rent, while 30 percent own.
- Riverside has a larger proportion of rent controlled units than does the city as a whole. Fifty-six percent of all housing units in the neighborhood come under rent control, as compared to 40 percent of all housing units in the city.
- The neighborhood has over 314 units of publicly assisted rental housing, or 10 percent of the total number of units. Of these, 159 units are in publicly-owned housing, 155 in publicly sub-

dized, but privately owned housing, and a small number in buildings owned by private nonprofit organizations. (See Appendix for full listing.)

- Most of the assisted rental housing developments (public and private) are designated as family; however, 155 units in the privately owned buildings are for the elderly.

Affordability

Riverside was not excluded from the real estate frenzy of the 1980s. Between 1985 and 1986, the median sale price of a single-family house increased by 46 percent. Single-family houses reached their highest median sale price in 1987 at \$238,000. Prices, and the number of sales, dropped considerably over the next two years, but the 1990 price was still *64 percent higher* than the 1984 price.

Riverside Housing Sales 1984-1990

Median Selling Price - Single Family

Year	Median sale price	% of change	# of sales
1984	\$114,000	N/A	5
1985	130,000	14%	5
1986	190,000	46%	9
1987	238,000	25%	7
1988	197,500	-17%	6
1989	175,000	-11%	3
1990	186,500	7%	6

Median Selling Price - Two Family

Year	Median sale price	% of change	# of sales
1984	\$ 93,000	N/A	5
1985	210,000	126%	3
1986	234,375	12%	3
1987	245,000	5%	4
1988	190,000	-22%	8
1989	110,000	-42%	2
1990	212,000	93%	3

Median Selling Price - Three Family

Year	Median sale price	% of change	# of sales
1984	\$ 130,000	N/A	7
1985	161,750	24%	6
1986	234,375	45%	3
1987	219,000	-7%	7
1988	159,000	-27%	1
1989	215,000	35%	3
1990	325,000	51%	3

The prices for two- and three-family houses made similarly dramatic increases over the whole decade, although there were considerable fluctuations year by year. By 1990, the median cost of a two-family house had increased by nearly 128 percent since 1984, while the median price of three family rose by 150 percent.

The condominium market was also strong in the neighborhood during the 1980s. Both the median sale price and the number of sales between the middle and the end of the decade alone rose by 57 and 156 percent respectively.

Median Selling Price - Condominium

Year	Median sale price	% of change	# of sales
1984	N/A	N/A	N/A
1985	\$ 128,850	N/A	16
1986	106,000	-18%	8
1987	129,500	22%	24
1988	158,000	22%	24
1989	202,000	28%	41
1990	N/A	N/A	N/A

As a consequence of the steep rise in housing prices, the income required to purchase a home in Cambridge (and in Riverside), no matter what type, has risen dramatically in the last decade. At the same time, the real income of many residents has not kept pace with the cost of housing. In addition, as the price of houses went up, the amount of the down payment increased proportionately. As the 1980s progressed, only those

with very high income jobs and substantial amounts of available cash were able to purchase a house.

The image of who *can* own housing in Riverside seems reinforced by who *does* own housing in Riverside. As income increases so does the likelihood of already owning a home.

Own/Rent by Income in Riverside 1990

Income	Own	Rent
low	6%	94%
moderate	11%	89%
middle	32%	68%
high	48%	52 %

Issues of affordability surround the rental market as well. While more than half (56%) of the rental units in the neighborhood are under rent control, the rest are not, and the rents for these units can be beyond the means of some Riverside residents. The 1990 telephone survey indicates that the median rent for controlled units is between \$301 and \$600 per month. Market rate units go for between \$601 and \$900 per month. The chart below shows the annual household income needed to meet these rents and the percentage of Riverside households at these income levels, if using not more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs.

Income Required to Rent in Riverside

Median Rent Control Rent (per month)	Annual Income Required	% of Riverside Households with Sufficient Income
\$301 to \$600	\$12,040 \$24,000	80% 56%
Median Noncontrolled Rent (per month)	Annual Income Required	% of Riverside Households with Sufficient Income
\$601 to \$900	\$24,040 \$36,000	56% 37%

Accessibility

A very large majority (81%) of the renters interviewed in the telephone survey said that they expected to own a home one day; however, very few (14%) felt that they could afford to buy a house in Riverside. About one-third said that if they could afford to buy anywhere, they would buy in Riverside, but almost half said they would go outside of Cambridge. The most frequently cited reason for this was affordability.

Study Committee members were frustrated by the fact that financing for affordable housing opportunities was so scarce in comparison to the need, and by the fact that sources of money change for each new project initiative, making projects only single-time opportunities, not models for future projects. All members found it abundantly clear that the amount of money needed to satisfy the city's need for affordable housing and to rehabilitate the existing stock is far beyond the City's fiscal capacity. Indeed, some members argued that our economic system does not trigger the mechanism needed to produce housing in quantities sufficient to house all society, and expressed the opinion that the federal government must re-establish its affordable housing initiatives through comprehensive policies and, hopefully, well funded programs.

One member pointed out that the single largest federal housing policy — deduction of interest on a home mortgage from an individual's income tax — is not accessible to an increasing number of people to get into the housing market, due to prohibitive prices and/or the large down payments required. The Study Committee agreed that the focus of City policy should be to upgrade and rehabilitate the existing stock (both renter and owner-occupied housing,) especially given the age of the stock and the needs of the population. They also agreed that the City should continue to create more home ownership opportunities through both new construction and the conversion of rental properties into limited equity cooperatives and condominiums.

More specifically to Cambridge, several members expressed concern with the existing rent control system, stating that it sometimes serves those who are not the neediest (and for whom rent control was intended) and that the seeming complexity of the regulations may deter owners who want to make repairs, but who do not know the system, from making capital improvements. The members urged the Rent Control Board to enforce the ordinance forbidding key fees or sales of rent control units and to streamline capital improvement procedures.

Housing Recommendations

HOUSING POLICY

1. Maintain the economic and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood;
2. Improve the maintenance of the housing stock, both for rental and owner-occupied units;
3. Preserve Riverside's current scale, density and character;
4. Create more affordable family-sized rental housing;
5. Increase affordable opportunities for home ownership through detached single-family, cooperative, or condominium housing programs;
6. Help make it possible for people who grew up in Riverside to afford to live here; and
7. Match the size and style of future housing to current trends in family size.

RENT CONTROLLED HOUSING

These recommendations are addressed to the Rent Control Board, unless otherwise noted.

1. Develop a program to fund maintenance of the rent controlled housing stock in a way that does not drive the rent levels up faster than the earning power of the population. This fund could be derived from a fee on high-income tenants occupying rent controlled units.
2. Create and adhere to performance standards that produce a reasonable turnaround time for rent control procedures. This would encourage owners and tenants to work within the system rather than working outside of it, or ignoring it altogether.
3. Enforce existing regulations forbidding the 'sale' of rent controlled units through bounties and key fees. This might help low- and moderate-income residents gain greater access to rent controlled housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL HOUSING SITES

Corporal Burns Playground

See Parks and Open Space Recommendations for more complete recommendations concerning Cpl. Burns Playground.

1. The Study Committee supports the Land Bank proposal to construct affordable housing on the eastern edge of the park along Banks Street. This should involve either the renovation or demolition of the old shower house. The Committee can support this measure only if:
 - a. any housing be limited to two- or three-story structures that match the texture, scale and setbacks of the surrounding wood-frame structures;
 - b. the remaining park and playground area be thoroughly redesigned and refurbished; and
 - c. the existing trees are preserved or replaced.

The City Council did not accept the proposed Land Banks sites for redevelopment into affordable housing.

Vacant "rent controlled" lot at 88 Putnam Avenue (at Kinnaird Street)

1. Explore the possibility of the City acquiring the lot to construct affordable housing at a reasonable density and designed to match the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood.
2. If it is not possible for the City to acquire the lot, then work with the owner to construct affordable housing on the land with the same conditions as above.

**Former Elbery Ford Site, 320-366 River Street
(at Putnam Avenue)**

This site is located in Cambridgeport; however, the Study Committee feels that any redevelopment taking place there will have considerable effect on Riverside.

1. Work with the owner to construct a mixed-use development on the site, including some affordable housing. The overall height of the project should be restricted and its street face should match the scale, density and height of the adjoining residential areas along River Street and Putnam Avenue.

**Empty Lots at 237-253 River Street
(adjoining Hoyt Field)**

1. Work with the owner to develop the lot for housing that matches the scale, density and heights of the neighboring structures.

**Max's, 279 Putnam Avenue
(at River Street)**

1. Encourage the owner to consider the site for housing.
2. Consider allowing relief from existing setback requirements to promote the construction of housing on the site while preserving the texture of the neighborhood.

EXPIRING USE PROPERTIES

**2 Mt. Auburn Street, 411 Franklin Street,
808 Memorial Drive and 929 Massachusetts
Avenue**

808 Memorial Drive is located in Cambridgeport, but many consider it to be a part of the Riverside community. The owner of 808 Memorial Drive has filed a notice with HUD of its intent to sell the property. Tenants at 808 are working with a Cambridge-based nonprofit organization, Homeowner's Rehab, Inc., to explore the feasibility of purchasing the complex and maintaining its affordability. In addition, the City is funding a tenant organizer to help residents with this process.

1. Continue to monitor the status of these properties and take steps to preserve their affordable units.

P A R K S A N D
O P E N S P A C E

Parks and Open Space

Introduction

Parks and open space are meeting places for a neighborhood. They help to form the bonds between individual residents to make a community. Riverside's parks are part of what make the neighborhood unique: the basketball games at Corporal Burns Playground, the River Festival at Riverside Press Park, the Spanish soccer league games at Hoyt Field, and the countless children who come to play at the King School Playground.

This chapter explores the problems of managing the neighborhood's seven parks and various open spaces, and examines design, maintenance and programming issues at specific parks. Through the recommendations listed here, the Committee seeks to enhance the role of parks in strengthening community life within the neighborhood.

Committee Discussions

Riverside's seven parks differ widely from each other. They range in size from one-tenth of an acre (Franklin Street Park) to 4.5 acres (Hoyt Field) and contain both active and passive uses. They serve different populations, from tots to adults. They also serve different size areas: tot lots tend to serve the more immediate surrounding neighborhood; while multiple-use parks, such as Hoyt Field, may serve residents from all over Riverside as well people from all over the city. Other parks, such as Riverbend Park (Memorial Drive) and the basketball courts at Corporal Burns, have a more regional draw, as well as a local one.

Corporal Burns Playground

Corporal Burn Playground is known throughout the city and beyond as one of the best places in the area to find a pick-up basketball game. Its not unusual to go by the courts at Cpl. Burns and find a game in progress virtually anytime of the year.

Cpl. Burns Playground sits on what once was tidal mud flats of the Charles River. During the late 19th century Harvard University owned most of the area that now makes up the park. At that time, the land was at the river's edge, and Harvard located its boat house there. By 1903, the university had moved its boat house to its present location at the foot of John F. Kennedy Street. At the same time the City was completing its construction of the embankment and parkway along the river, thus leaving the site landlocked. By the early 1920s, the City had built a playground on the former boat house site. Today Cpl. Burns is one of the two public areas that link the residential neighborhood to the Charles River, the other being Riverside Press Park. Both Riverside Press Park and Cpl. Burns are major venues for the City's annual River Festival.

Corporal Burns Park is a multi-use park meeting a variety of recreational needs; however, despite the popularity of the basketball courts, the 1.3 acre park is generally underutilized. The tot lot equipment is old, thus not as attractive as the King School. The concrete shelter adds little to the playground, either aesthetically or functionally, and the field house is used only for storage. Given that the playground is one of only two publicly accessible links to the Charles River and

that its current layout does not fully meet the needs of the community, the Study Committee felt strongly that Cpl. Burns be renovated.

The Committee also supported the Land Bank proposal to build affordable housing on a portion of the park along Banks Street. Members, (some with reluctance but understanding,) felt that this trade-off was justified in light of the need for more affordable housing in the city and in the neighborhood, the scarcity of available land for its development, and neighborhood support for additional affordable housing as indicated in the results of the 1990 telephone survey.

Hoyt Field

Hoyt Field, like Cpl. Burns Playground, had its beginnings in the salt marshes that once made up most of Riverside. The neighborhood's largest park, Hoyt sits on what was once the site of a mill pond in the 19th century. The pond was created by the continual filling of the tidal marsh around it during the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1880, however, the City filled in the pond making it available for further development. The 1903 atlas shows streets and house lots were laid out through the newly gained land with the seeming intention of subdividing the area for residential development. Most of these lots were owned by the City of Cambridge. The subdivision, however, never took place, and the 1916 atlas notes the area as the Mill Pond Playground. By this time privately owned homes had been built on the land surrounding the park, including River, Howard, and Montague Streets and Western Avenue. The atlas shows Montague Street passing through from River to Western and not cut off as it is today. The City also owned the lots south of Montague where the tennis and basketball courts are located today.

Hoyt Field is one of the central amenities of the neighborhood containing the largest number and variety of facilities of any park in the neighborhood, and serving people both from within Riverside and throughout the city. Because of this, the Committee felt that its physical appearance should reflect its importance in the neighborhood and named Hoyt as a priority for capital

funding. Hoyt Field was last rehabilitated in 1981 when the tot lots were replaced. The City removed the tot lot equipment in 1990 for safety reasons, with the intention of redesigning the park when future money is available. (As of the date of this report, a \$1 million rehabilitation of the park has been completed.) The Committee also recommends that future programming for Hoyt includes all the different groups living in the neighborhood (see General Issues and Concerns.)

King School Playground

When you think of the King School Playground, you think of kids, countless numbers of little kids. King is one of the most recently rehabilitated (1988) of Riverside's parks, and one of the most heavily used. It is connected to the Martin Luther King, Jr. School which the City built in 1971. The playground consists of an enclosed tot lot designed for young children and toddlers, a play structure and open area for older children, and a basketball court. It is in generally good condition, especially considering its almost constant use.

Prior to its reconstruction, King Playground was mostly an ill-defined open area with two deteriorated basketball courts. Teachers from the school used part of the open area for parking, and several residents used it for overnight parking. The 1988 reconstruction of the playground included a separate area for teacher parking along with the new play structures and plantings.

The renovation of the playground not only provided new play equipment and better defined and safer areas, it also included the construction of six limited-equity condominiums on Hayes and Magee Streets. The project was a joint venture between the Riverside Cambridgeport Community Corporation and the City, and the homes were sold by raffle to moderate-income residents. Because of the inclusion of affordable housing in the project, the City was able to secure a state Community Development Action Grant (CDAG) to fund the playground renovations. This is only one of two parks in the city which have had this unique partnership of linking housing development with open space improvements, the other being Columbia Street Park in Neighborhood 4.

The Committee, understanding the great effort that went into the public planning process and rehabilitation of the playground, saw King as a good example of bringing the neighborhood together to strengthen community life. They also worried that the park may be a victim of its own success: that over use may cause unwarranted deterioration and undo the many good things that have come about as a result of rebuilding the park. The first issue raised was the distribution of play space. Hoyt and Cpl. Burns need to be made as attractive as King so that King will not wear out before its time. The second issue brought up was the need to include maintenance funds in capital funding requests. The Committee felt that the City will only waste its money if sufficient funding is not set aside (or increased) for maintenance when parks are rehabbed. The third issue the Committee discussed was public review of design features that work and those that do not. The Committee referred specifically to what was intended to be a green space in the center of the playground, but what is now a dirt patch. This is due to the difficulty of maintaining the grass given the intensive use of the area for active play. The Committee felt that residents may like the idea of a green space, but need to understand that under certain circumstances, like at King, such a feature may not work, and may add to maintenance problems (see General Issues and Concerns.)

Riverside Press Park

Riverside Press Park is virtually the only testament to the presses and binderies that operated in the neighborhood for over a hundred years. Built in the early 1980s, the park sits on the site of Houghton Mifflin's Riverside Press. The effort to build the park started in the early 1970s when the publishing company announced plans to close its Cambridge operations. After several years of negotiations between the City and the company, Houghton Mifflin agreed to sell just over three acres of the four acre site to the City at below market price. This parcel became Riverside Press Park, while the remainder of the property was sold

for commercial development and is now the office building at 840 Memorial Drive.

With the land purchased, the City began the design of the park. Originally, the City intended the park for passive use; however, after discussions with the neighboring residents, a plan combining both active and passive uses was agreed upon. The state financed construction with a \$1 million federal Land and Water Conservation grant.

Riverside Press Park is clearly divided into its active and passive uses. The passive area with its grassy knoll and stone sculpture faces the Charles and Memorial Drive, while the tennis courts, basketball courts and play area are concentrated along Blackstone Street. Neighborhood residents, especially teens, use the park extensively, and it is the cornerstone for the City's annual River Festival. The Study Committee's major concerns revolved around the lack of visibility of the active play areas from River Street, making people feel less comfortable about the park from a security point of view. The other concern was a desire to see the gas station on the corner become part of the park. Overall the Committee felt the maintenance of the park was good.

Franklin Street Park

What the Study Committee sees in Franklin Street Park is potential. The smallest park in Riverside, it was built in 1977 on a former house lot. Thus long and narrow, the park is dark at the rear, and, with its concrete seating and paving, can be very uninviting. However, the park does have a stand of full, shade-giving honey locust trees and faces south. The Committee felt that the area, with the removal of the concrete and some creative design work, would make an excellent tot lot for very small children and a sitting area for neighborhood residents, especially for the elderly at 411 Franklin Street (see General Issues and Concerns.)

Sullivan Park

Privately owned Sullivan Park is the neighborhood's newest open space. It was con-

structed in 1982-1983 as part of the development of 1000 Massachusetts Avenue. The zoning (Business B-1) for the parcel required the owners, Spaulding & Slye, to construct either a park or housing on that portion of the property abutting Green Street, creating a transition between the high-density commercial development along Massachusetts Avenue and the low-rise residential district on Green Street. Neighbors had substantial input into the final design of the park.

The Committee's major concern with Sullivan Park is security. They felt that the vines growing on the fence around the park could make pedestrians feel uncomfortable about walking by the park, especially at night. In addition, although the gates to the park are locked at night, the foliage encourages vagrants to sleep in the park. Indeed, as the Committee was touring the park one evening, a man climbed out of the park over the fence. The Committee encourages the park's owner to increase the visibility into the park for a greater sense the security along the street.

Memorial Drive/Riverbend Park

There is very little that is more important to defining Riverside's physical identity than the Charles River; therefore, access to the river and the management of its associated open space is critical to the neighborhood. Much of the Committee's concerns revolved around future development along the riverfront. The Committee felt very strongly that any development along the riverfront properties not encroach upon the recreational and natural purposes of the Charles. Likewise, they felt it was equally important that the Metropolitan District Commission which owns the riverfront and operates Memorial Drive, control traffic to protect the recreational purposes of the roadway. (see General Issues and Concerns.)

More specifically, the Committee stated some concerns about traffic flow during the summer when the MDC closes Memorial Drive to automobiles. Members cited problems with accidents at Putnam Avenue and Hingham Street. Poor visibility at this intersection with cars coming up Hingham from Memorial Drive and the Grower's

Market make the intersection hazardous. Another problem is with traffic backing up on Putnam Avenue near Massachusetts Avenue. One member suggested a blinking light at the intersection to allow traffic to flow more freely and alleviate any backup on Putnam.

What do Riverside residents say about their parks and open spaces? Results from the 1990 telephone survey.

Riverside residents hold their parks in high regard.

45% said the *condition of parks and open spaces* was a major concern to them:

- this includes newcomers and long-time respondents; younger and middle age respondents; and those with and without children.
- older respondents were the only group saying this matter was of no concern to them.

54% said the *availability of parks and open spaces* was a major concern to them:

- this includes the same group as above
- again, older residents were the only ones to say it was not a concern to them

Residents have more mixed opinions about the *availability of recreational facilities*

- 39% said this was a major concern
- 38% said it was a minor concern
- 23% said it was not a concern
- however, families with children in school are most concerned about this, with 54% saying it was a major concern.

General Issues and Concerns

In addition to specific parks, the Committee discussed at length the overall management of open space. Of highest concern was long-term and preventative maintenance of parks, especially those that have been renovated in the past few years. The Committee said that they saw (and were pleased with) the amount of money the City was spending on renovations, but were greatly concerned that they did not see a commensurate amount of daily and long-term maintenance of these projects. The

Committee pointed at King School as an example of this. After the park was renovated the City's Open Space Committee gave the park an A rating, but because of the intensity of use and the inability to maintain the park at the same pace, the park was a grade B by 1990. The Committee felt that the City's substantial financial investment in rehabilitations must be protected through an equivalent commitment to ongoing preventative maintenance.

The Committee was also concerned with design elements which may become maintenance problems. The Committee noted the central open play area in King as such an element. Originally grass, the area is now a big dirt patch because of the kind of use and because of the intensity of use. The use by the kids is not inappropriate, but the area was not designed for the intensity of activity taking place there. The Committee wants designers to seek solutions that are aesthetic, but maintainable in the real world of running and playing children. The Committee, however, did not want the City to adopt a design policy at the other extreme, namely designing a park with solely maintenance in mind. The Committee used Franklin Street Park as an example of this. The poured concrete surfaces of the park are easy to maintain and virtually indestructible, but the overall effect is that of an unappealing and inhospitable place, and, as a consequence, the park is seldom used.

Another topic the Committee raised was how different users, such as the elderly, were identified and their needs incorporated into the design and programming of a park. Some members felt

that a place like Franklin Street was too general and not useful to any one group. They felt it could be redesigned to target tots and the elderly with the elderly looking out to the street near the front of the park while the tots and their parents use the back of the lot which is more contained. The Committee felt strongly that not only the design, but programming too, should meet the needs of the whole population. The Committee felt that some populations were underserved namely the elderly and handicapped residents.

The last major issue addressed was access to open space. The Committee identified the Charles River and the Harvard campus as two areas of prime concern. With the river it is a matter of visual and physical access. There are only two areas with public access to the river: Cpl. Burns Playground and Riverside Press Park. Private development along the river otherwise cuts the neighborhood off from the source of its name. Some members thought that access through Peabody Terrace was not always clear or blocked (the dumpster.) Memorial Drive is another barrier. There are few safe crossing points. At the River and Western intersections there are no pedestrian cycles on the traffic lights. There is one at Dewolfe Street, and another at JFK Street serving mostly Harvard University. The Committee felt that no more barriers should be erected, especially with whatever future development occurs on the Grower's Market site. Harvard agreed to maintain and enhance public access through Peabody Terrace; however, the university needs to keep the gates to the Harvard Houses locked for security purposes.

Parks and Open Space Recommendations

Based on the discussion, tour and survey results, the Committee broke their discussion into two broad categories: general management and administration; and individual parks.

These recommendations are directed to the City's Open Space Committee, unless otherwise noted.

Administration

1. Make creative use of existing community resources:
 - a. encourage the involvement of community groups, as called for in the City's Open Space Plan; and
 - b. establish a liaison between the residents and the City through the City Manager's Office dealing explicitly with open space and park issues.
2. Support the City's Open Space Plan including the policy making and coordination efforts of the Open Space Committee comprising the directors and staff of the Department of Public Works, Department of Human Services Programs and the Community Development Department, along with the Deputy City Manager, in the open space planning process.
3. Record successful and unsuccessful park designs, programming and maintenance efforts to establish a centralized record of what works and what does not work. The record could become a resource for community groups during the initial planning process. Full design development of a park will be the responsibility of the City's landscape architect.
4. Increase police sweeps and surveillance of all parks to promote responsible use of parks and to deter crime and disturbances from occurring.

Allocation of Resources

1. Include resources for maintenance in new capital projects and add conditions to construction contracts that would provide for follow-up maintenance.
2. Require long-term maintenance on new capital projects:
 - a. the City should adopt a policy that would mandate that funds be set aside in its budget for maintenance of capital projects; and
 - b. in the absence of sufficient maintenance resources, capital funds could be used to stockpile spare parts, if sufficient city storage space is available.

Maintenance

1. Involve schools in the maintenance of playgrounds. Schools could create a program which involves the students in the maintenance of parks and playgrounds. The program should emphasize the students' partnership with their neighborhood.
2. Tie maintenance schedule to level of use.
3. Inspect parks on a regular basis. Inspectors must be well qualified and have product (equipment) knowledge, as called for in the City's Open Space Plan.
4. Include maintenance training for park inspectors and maintenance personnel in capital investment, as called for in the City's Open Space Plan. Future hires should be qualified maintenance workers.

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5. Design parks and open space with both maintenance and aesthetics in mind. Design features of new projects should be aesthetically pleasing and lend themselves to easy maintenance.

Programming

1. Design open spaces and parks to reflect use and programming. As outlined in the City's Open Space Plan, users should be identified, and programming should be reflective of their needs.
2. Explore ways to increase programming for indoor recreational activities.
3. Develop programming to meet the needs of the elderly and female populations. This in light of a gender and age bias perceived in current programming.
4. Integrate city programming with private facilities. Look for opportunities in private facilities to provide city-sponsored outreach.
5. Explore creative ways to staff parks, such as partnerships with universities, to place students in parks to provide active and involved personnel at parks and teen facilities.

Community Monitoring

1. Riverside residents should form a neighborhood group to review the conditions of the neighborhood's parks and open space each year and submit this report along with recommendations for future actions to the City Council and City Manager each year. This oversight of the neighborhood's parks and open spaces will become a permanent part of the group's agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPECIFIC PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

Corporal Burns Playground

1. Make the playground more active through placement of recreation staff who will interact with users and develop programming.
2. Take advantage of the playground's size for active play. This playground is larger than others in the neighborhood, and that openness should

be designed and maintained in such a way to meet the active play needs of the neighborhood best .

3. Create space for younger kids and soften the surfaces to make the playground safer and more inviting to them.
4. Remove the concrete open shelter in the center of the playground, thus adding to the amount of active play area in the park.
5. Rehabilitate the tennis courts to make them regulation size.
6. Preserve the basketball courts.
7. Plant street trees on both sides of Flagg Street to create a more inviting pedestrian connection between the river and the neighborhood and soften the hard edge of Mather House.
8. Install signs to indicate access to the playground and river, particularly at the alley leading from Putnam Avenue through Peabody Terrace.
9. The Study Committee supports the Land Bank proposal to construct affordable housing on a portion of the park along Banks Street, provided the park be renovated as described above. (See the Housing Recommendations for further detail.)

Hoyt Field

1. Make the rehabilitation/redesign of Hoyt Field a top capital budget priority.
2. As part of the planning process for the rehabilitation/redesign of Hoyt Field, explore all potential uses including:
 - a. adding more passive open space;
 - b. adding space for a variety of teenage activities;
 - c. encouraging multi-generational uses; and
 - d. developing a programmatic relationship between the teen center and the field.
3. As part of the rehabilitation/redesign of the field:
 - a. remove outdated and dangerous playground equipment and replace it with equipment which meets current safety standards;
 - b. remove the concrete bleachers, as they are an eyesore and their location promotes illicit activity;

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- c. consider moving the tennis courts and basketball courts further away from the residential abutters; and
 - d. create clearer, signed entrances to the park from River Street and Western Avenue, as well as install play area signs along these streets to slow traffic.

A \$1 million renovation of Hoyt Field was completed in the Spring of 1994. The project included demolition and removal of the concrete bleachers and old play equipment and construction of new play areas, improvements to the basketball and tennis courts, landscaping, lighting, fencing and a new ball field.

- 4. Examine the potential for using the vacant lots on River Street and Western Avenue to create better access to Hoyt Field and additional neighborhood housing.

Franklin Street Park

- 1. Redesign the park with particular users and abutters in mind. The park may best serve small children, or toddlers, and the elderly, especially the residents of 411 Franklin Street.
- 2. As part of the redesign of the park:
 - a. differentiate spaces and define activities clearly to accommodate all targeted users to improve the relationship of the park to the street;
 - b. soften the surfaces by removing much of the concrete;
 - c. create a more open feeling by thoughtful thinning of the trees;
 - d. enhance safety by adding lighting to the rear of the park; and
 - e. discourage vagrancy by adding a fence and a gate.
- 3. Post the times when the park is open.

H A R V A R D
U N I V E R S I T Y

Harvard University

Introduction

During the first meetings of the Study Committee in August 1990, the staff asked the members if they wanted to invite Harvard to sit on the study. There were mixed and strong opinions about this. Some members said that it would be useful for Harvard to be a part of the Committee's discussions as the university is the largest landowner in the neighborhood, and it could affect any decision or recommendation the committee made. Others did not want to have Harvard participate on the Committee, questioning the university's motives for wanting to be part of the group. Some thought that the presence of Harvard might be useful to the Committee and the community as the study process might be a way for the residents to communicate their concerns to Harvard in a structured and pro-active way. After much debate, all members of the Committee decided to invite Harvard to join the group as a full member for the life of the study. By the end of the study, every one on the Committee felt it was necessary to continue building a cooperative relationship between the community and university.

Harvard in Riverside

For the history of Harvard's presence in Riverside, please see the Neighborhood Profile Chapter of the Study.

Harvard University owns about one-third of the land comprising Riverside. Most of the university's property is concentrated at the western end between John F. Kennedy Street and Banks Street, although they own substantial

parcels further east along the river. The largest use, - about 80% - is university residences, either dormitories or affiliate housing. The Harvard Houses, built in the early 20th century, make up most of the housing, with significant later developments such as Peabody Terrace, Mather House, and just recently, the Dewolfe Street housing. Just over another ten percent is dedicated to institutional support facilities, such as the student health clinic, and administrative offices of the university. The most identifiable of the administrative buildings located in Riverside is Holyoke Center at 1350 Massachusetts Avenue. The remaining, nine percent, are noninstitutional commercial uses, such as Grower's Market and Au Bon Pain, and non-institutional residential units. The non-institutional residential use consists of 206 units of rent controlled housing in 35 buildings. With the exception of the undergraduate houses and the student health clinic, which are managed by the faculty of Arts and Sciences respectively, the remaining properties are managed by Harvard Real Estate, a subsidiary of Harvard corporation. Harvard Real Estate was set up in 1978 for the sole purpose of managing the university's nonacademic real estate holdings, including affiliate housing and the mixed-use Holyoke Center building.

Harvard's real estate holdings in Riverside have not changed substantially over the past ten years in comparison to the 1960s and 70s. Since 1980 the university has acquired five parcels: three near John F. Kennedy Street between Mt.

Auburn and Winthrop Streets; 8-10 Mt. Auburn Street; and St. Paul's rectory at 34 Mt. Auburn Street (see Sales/Acquisition map.) Harvard is leasing the rectory to the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) which, in turn, developed the property into 19 single room occupancy (SRO) units and two family-size rental units, with an apartment for a resident manager. The lease is for 40 years, expiring in 2031. The CHA opened the rectory in the summer of 1993, and uses some of the SRO units to house homeless persons. This is the second lease arrangement between Harvard University and the Cambridge Housing Authority. Harvard owns and manages the elderly housing at 2-4 Mt. Auburn Street. The 94 unit apartment building was built by Harvard and the Cambridge corporation using a very low interest federal mortgage. The terms of the mortgage obligates Harvard to maintain the units as affordable housing until the year 2000.

In addition to its acquisitions, Harvard University has sold nine parcels in the neighborhood since 1980, totaling 39,000 square feet. Most of the parcels were small house lots scattered throughout the neighborhood. The most significant sale, in terms of size and effect on the community, was the River-Howard Homes to the Riverside Cambridgeport Community Corporation (RCCC), a nonprofit housing agency. RCCC, now no longer operating, sold the 32 unit affordable housing complex to the Cambridge Housing Authority.

The university undertook three construction projects between 1980 and 1990: the creation of a pedestrian link between Eliot and Kirkland Houses near John F. Kennedy Street; affiliate housing and retail at 8-10 Mt. Auburn Street; and 81 units of affiliate housing and a child care center on Dewolfe Street behind St. Paul's rectory. Additionally Harvard-Radcliffe Hillel has completed the construction of a new Hillel House on Mt. Auburn Street to serve the religious needs of the Jewish population at the university.

Under existing zoning, Harvard retains significant development potential in Riverside. Nearly all of the university's real estate is located

in a Residence C-3 zoning district which generally allows three times the amount of building area as land area with no height limit. The Residence C-3 zoning is, in fact, intended as a high density residential designation permitting institutional uses. The Harvard Houses, and even Peabody Terrace, are built out to only about two-thirds of what could be constructed there; however, the university has not stated any intentions to redevelop these properties. Moreover, Harvard is undertaking a three phase, rehabilitation of Peabody Terrace, starting in 1992. The most likely sites for Harvard to develop in the foreseeable future are the Grower's Market (Memorial Drive,) the Cowperthwaite Street parking lot, and the Grant and Banks Streets parking lot. There is also a small lot next to Peabody Terrace, although the university is currently renting it to Field of Dreams, a neighborhood community garden group. All together, Harvard could build over 400,000 square feet of new construction. The largest site is the Grower's Market, which has the potential of nearly 240,000 square feet of total development.

The university does not have a single master plan; the individual faculties such as the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which controls most of the university's property in Riverside, develop their own capital plans which are reviewed and facilitated by the central administration. Recently, however, Harvard has initiated efforts aimed at establishing a more coordinated and comprehensive university-wide planning process. The efforts focus on improving communication between individual units of the university, and on formulating capital plans within the context of university-wide planning issues and community objectives. In May 1994, Harvard announced its first university-wide capital campaign. An estimated \$450 million, 23% of the campaign's goal, will go toward renovating buildings, developing technology and buying equipment. A third of that amount, \$150 million, will be used to construct new buildings. This includes Boston and Cambridge. There are no capital campaign projects located in Riverside.

What do Riverside residents say about Harvard University? The results of the 1990 telephone survey.

59% of all respondents (51% of the nonstudent respondents) say that Harvard has a positive effect on the neighborhood:

- newer residents are most likely to feel this way
- longer term residents (11 or more years) had more mixed feelings towards Harvard with 36% saying that the university has a positive impact, 26% saying that it has a negative impact, and 38% saying the university has no effect on the neighborhood.

Lower income residents were less likely to think that Harvard has a positive impact than those with higher incomes.

The most frequently named positive effects are:

- the people associated with the university
- the diversity that the presence of the university brings to the neighborhood
- the physical improvements

The most frequently named negative impacts are:

- over development
- causes higher rents in the neighborhood
- causes housing shortages

Committee Discussions

There were no lack of topics for the Study Committee to discuss about Harvard University, given the school's presence in the neighborhood. Committee member and Harvard representative, Tanya Iatrides, was joined by the Director of the Harvard Planning Office, Kathy Spiegelman, and the Director of Community Affairs, Marilyn O'Connell, for this module. Everyone on the Committee, residents and Harvard representatives alike, admitted that the past relationship between Harvard and the neighborhood was a troubled one, and they wanted to explore ways to build more positive links between the school and the community.

The residents on the Committee named the acquisition of property as a significant concern in the community in the past and wanted to hear

about the university's current outlook on this matter. The representatives from the university said that Harvard no longer buys property just because it's available. The university is becoming much more selective in its acquisitions, with the administration needing to have a specific future use in mind, rather than open land banking. The university has, over the last decade, also sold properties which were not useful in supporting the school's mission. In addition, the university continues to abide by a commitment not to buy residential property outside the boundary line known as the Red Line. The original commitment was through 1980 and the university has voluntarily continued to observe it.

The group asked about the sale of residential property to Harvard affiliates, offering these potential buyers favorable mortgages. Harvard did at one time do this, but has since stopped that practice.

The Committee members relayed that many of the neighborhood's residents feel Harvard ignores Riverside in respect to the management of their property. They cited examples such as the location of the dumpsters in the "back" of Peabody Terrace which faces the neighborhood; the piling of trash "behind" Mather House along Flagg Street facing Cpl. Burns Playground and the houses on Banks Street; and large, unfriendly spiked fences around electrical equipment, again behind Mather House but facing the neighborhood. Members also spoke of the messiness around Grower's Market and asked Harvard to prod them to clean up the edges of their property. The Harvard representatives said that the university is trying to redress these problems, citing the rehab of Peabody Terrace as a starting point. As part of the renovation work, the university removed the dumpsters near Putnam Avenue, improved the walkway between Putnam Avenue and Memorial Drive, and upgraded exterior landscaping. One of the objectives of the landscaping was to make Peabody Terrace a more inviting walkway to the river for the community. The landscaping included a small children's playground which is used by a neighborhood school. Harvard has also made a community

garden available on Elmer street. Future projects will also take the community's perspective into consideration.

A large part of the discussion focused on the university's development policies and planning practices. Residents recounted criticism over the school's past practice of clearing large areas and building massive structures that were not connected to the residential neighborhood, either in character or scale, as was done in the case of Peabody Terrace.

In response, the Harvard representatives explained that Peabody Terrace was an example of accepted planning practices as well as architectural and social theories of the 1960s, both within the university and by cities, as seen by the urban renewal programs set up throughout the country at that time. The university representatives said that Harvard, along with everyone else, has since rejected those practices and now strives for change within the existing urban fabric, acknowledging the character, scale and pattern of the surrounding area. Today, the university seeks to meet its operational needs while not being as intrusive into the residential neighborhoods. They cited the new Dewolfe Street housing as an example of current practices.

The Committee discussed possible future development projects, listing their concerns as a lack of a public process to inform the neighborhood about details of projects, and the need for development guidelines for potential development sites in the transition areas between the core campus and the heart of the neighborhood. Uppermost in the minds of some members was that the community not lose its connection to the Charles River by any future development of the Grower's Market site, along with respect for the scale, pattern and character of the neighborhood. They also do not want to see an institutional "wall" rise up between the neighborhood and the

campus with any future development on the Grant Street and Cowperthwaite Street parking lots. Harvard agreed that creating a set of development guidelines and standards for these transitional areas would be helpful to the university and the neighborhood. The Committee members and university representatives agreed that the best way create such guidelines and standards would be through a process involving the community, city and institutions. The resident members also urged Harvard to include housing for the community if Grower's Market is redeveloped as university housing.

Harvard also agreed to relay any future development plans to the community and to work with the direct abutters of a particular project. Harvard also urged the neighborhood to form an association as a vehicle for on-going communications between the community and the school. Harvard expressed the hope that it can establish a good working relationship with the neighborhood in order to facilitate the needs of both in the future.

The residents on the Committee expressed hope that the university would take more concern for the social needs of the Riverside community and urge the students who live in the neighborhood, especially in affiliate housing, to become a part of the community.

There has been a ongoing, positive relationship between the students at the Mather House and the students of the Community Schools Program at the Martin Luther King Jr. School through the Mather House public service program. The Harvard representatives stressed that the university sees it as important to have a productive relationship with the community. Everyone agreed that continuous dialogue was key for this to happen.

Harvard University

Recommendations

All recommendations in this section are addressed to Harvard University unless otherwise noted.

Public Presentation

1. Remove or conceal dumpsters visible to the neighborhood, or otherwise inappropriately placed along the edge of the neighborhood, including at Peabody Terrace across from King School and at Mather House along Flagg Street.

Harvard has rebuilt the dumpster area at Peabody Terrace to include a more attractive enclosure as part of their phased rehabilitation of the complex. The University will also build an enclosure for trash at Mather House in 1993.

2. Reconsider removing the fencing around open spaces which close off large developments, such as at Peabody Terrace and Mather House, to the neighborhood. Often this open space was presented originally as a community amenity.

Harvard will replace the fence along the Memorial Drive side of Peabody Terrace as part of their phased rehabilitation of the complex. Rehabilitation is scheduled for completion in 1993. Exterior landscaping has been added to help soften the exterior edges of the complex and improve the walkway to the River.

3. Increase the number of trees, especially street trees along Flagg Street at Mather House, to soften the streetscape.

As part of the improvements to the grounds around Mather House in 1993, Harvard will plant two or three trees along Flagg Street, depending on soil conditions.

4. Increase maintenance of Grower's Market, especially at the edges of the property.
5. Keep up, or increase plowing of roads and sidewalks. This service benefits the entire neighborhood.

Community Interaction

1. In general, encourage constructive interaction between Harvard and Riverside, including the following specific recommendations:
 - a. Encourage the multi-cultural population at Peabody Terrace to interact with and take advantage of the many opportunities in Riverside including stores, activities and churches. Co-host a "Welcome to Riverside" multi-cultural event with the neighborhood.
 - b. Examine the use of community gardens on underutilized Harvard land, and encourage students to participate in any proposed community gardens in Riverside.

Field of Dreams, a community gardening group, now has two gardens on Harvard property which Harvard Real Estate made available: one on Elmer Street and the other on Banks Street. Both have year by year agreements.

- c. Publicize the day-care offerings of Peabody Terrace residents to Riverside residents.
- d. Maintain an ongoing interaction between Harvard and the Riverside neighborhood, especially through a Riverside neighborhood committee.

Harvard has come to the neighborhood on two occasions this past year to discuss the rehabilitation of Peabody Terrace.

- e. Have a community orientation for the faculty, staff and students of Harvard. Organize orientations in both directions, for example, a Harvard Guide to Riverside and a Riverside Guide to Harvard.
2. Encourage stronger direct support of the Riverside neighborhood, especially by having a

Harvard representative sit on the Board of the Cambridge Community Center.

Peter Armstrong from Harvard's Office of Government, Community, and Public Affairs now sits on the Community Center's Board.

Development

1. Establish development standards and guidelines which would apply to potential development sites including:
 - a. Grower's Market site (870-886 Memorial Drive);
 - b. Cowperthwaite parking lot (1-13 Cowperthwaite Street);
 - c. Grant and Banks Streets parking lot (3-15 Grant Street and 37-39 Banks Street); and
 - d. Elmer Street lot (27-29 Elmer Street).
2. Structure such standards and guidelines to:
 - a. insure that the edges of any proposed development projects are in keeping with the height and scale of the abutting residential neighborhood, and have appropriate setbacks thus providing a smooth and visually unobtrusive transition between the institutional and residential districts;
 - b. encourage neighborhood connection and access to the river, both by car and on foot;
 - c. mix institutional and noninstitutional uses, especially appropriate neighborhood uses, such as residential and small retail;
 - d. screen and landscape all parking sites to buffer the abutters; and
 - e. place unsightly elements of development, including dumpsters, cooling units, exhaust fans, transformers, large blank walls, loading docks, and fences with dangerous spikes away from the residential neighborhood, or screen them sufficiently so that they are not a visual intrusion into the neighborhood.

The Committee proposes that the best way to approach this recommendation is to form a working group comprising Riverside residents, City officials, and representatives from Harvard University. The working group would develop the specifics of the standards and guidelines delineated in this section.

3. Construct structured parking within the campus and not in or directly next to the residential neighborhood.
4. Examine and address traffic and parking issues as a result of new construction.
5. The Study Committee supports residential uses for available development sites.
6. The Study Committee supports retail use at 8-10 Mt. Auburn Street.
7. The Study Committee supports housing or a community garden at Elmer Street.

Housing

1. Maintain the on going dialogue regarding university housing policies with the Riverside community through a neighborhood association;
2. Work with the City to find ways of accommodating growth without displacing local residents.
3. Work with the Riverside community and the City to include housing and provide some mixed income component in any future redevelopment of the Grower's Market at 807 Memorial Drive.

Policy

In general, Harvard should examine its policies as related to neighborhood issues for all facilities, especially parking and housing, and specifically:

1. Meet with abutters and a Riverside neighborhood organization to review any proposed development projects.
2. Investigate whether the informal Harvard "Red Line" policy should be expanded, formalized or altered.
3. Develop a master plan for future Harvard growth (Project 2000), recognizing and considering the input of neighborhood groups.

Harvard University urges the Riverside neighborhood to organize an ongoing citizens' association as a vehicle for future dialogue and communication between the university and the Riverside community.